DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 637 EC 308 525

AUTHOR	Singh, Delar K.
TITLE	I Will Make It: Disabled and Different.
PUB DATE	2000-10-12
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the combined Symposium of the Council for Exceptional Children and the Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners (Albuquerque, NM, October 12-13, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Beliefs; Case Studies; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; Demography; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Relationship; Family School Relationship; *Indians; *Moral Values; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Spina Bifida

ABSTRACT

This paper reports a case study of Rajesh, a highly motivated and successful Asian Indian youth who has a severe form of spina bifida, a complex condition of the central nervous system. The paper also describes the demographics and discusses the child rearing practices of Asian Indian families, explains family structure and role relationships in Asian Indian culture, discusses the value and belief systems of Asian Indian families, and delineates the communication styles that are utilized by Asian Indian families. Asian Indians are described as having a group orientation interdependent within the family, valuing the importance of academic achievement, valuing conformity, having humility and concern for others, emphasizing spirituality, and believing that actions of past lives affect the circumstances in which one is born and will life in this life. The paper concludes that it is imperative for all educators to acquire cross-cultural competence and that reliable alliances can only be established when cultural diversity is honored. It is recommended that educators follow the posture of cultural reciprocity that involves sharing perspectives among families and educators in an effort to understand one another. (Contains 12 references and 4 figures.) (CR)

ED 455 637

I Will Make It: Disabled and Different

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Delar K. Singh, Ph.D.
Faculty, Department of Education
Niagara University
Niagara University, NY 14109
E-Mail: dks@niagara.edu

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Singh
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Presented at CEC/DDEL Symposium on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners, Albuquerque, NM
October 12, 2000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EC 308 525

ABSTRACT

This paper reports a case study of a highly motivated and successful Asian Indian youth who has severe form of Spina Bifida. Spina Bifida is a complex condition of central nervous system. It results in multiple challenges. The paper also clarifies beliefs, values, motivational strategies, family structure, support systems, and communication styles that are utilized by Asian Indian families.

I Will Make it: Disabled and Different

In this new millennium, one word that can best describe the American society, is "diversity." We are amidst an unparalleled variety of cultures and languages. Our society has become truly pluralistic. Several ethnic groups blend here amazingly well while maintaining their own heritage and their own authenticity. From distant parts of the world, approximately, one million immigrants enter the United States every year and make it their permanent home (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995).

This increasing diversity has a definite impact on our schools. Many of the school children are bilingual. They speak a language other than English in their homes. Census data indicate that in the schools of Washington, DC, New York, and Chicago, student population speaks more than 100 languages or dialects. Furthermore, language, race and culture are known to affect the extent to which school experiences are relevant and appropriate. Not only that, parents of these children are busy pursuing their very personal dreams. And, they all share a trait- an insatiable drive to follow their dreams and aspirations even if it means packing and relocating to a foreign land. (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995).

Clearly, teachers can no longer afford to teach from a monocultural perspective. To be effective, they need to acquire knowledge and skills in cross-cultural education. Cross-cultural education focuses on the transformation of the school so that students from each cultural/racial and linguistic group gain an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

The major purposes of this paper are to: (1) report a case study of an Asian Indian youth who has spina bifida; is highly motivated, and academically successful; (2) sketch demographics of Asian Indian families (3) discuss child rearing practices in Asian Indian

families; (4) explain family structure and role relationships in Asian Indian culture; (5) discuss value system of Asian Indian families; (5) describe the belief system of Asian Indian families; and (6) delineate the styles of communication in Asian Indian homes.

Profile of Rajesh

Rajesh is a wheelchair bound youth. He has normal intelligence. He comes off an Asian Indian family. He was born in one of the western states with a congenital deformity of the nervous system, known as spina bifida. Within hours of his birth, he was operated upon his lower back for the repair of the lesion that had resulted from spina bifida. His parents had never heard of spina bifida prior to his birth. They were not aware of the various challenges such as paralysis of lower limbs, dislocated hips, and double incontinence that are associated with this condition.

Within months after Rajesh's birth, his family moved to Michigan. Rajesh's medical care was continued in one of the area hospitals. It was here that the family really learned about spina bifida. As family was going through shock and denial, Rajesh developed hydrocephalus (water brain), a life threatening condition, which can lead to mental retatrdation (Mitchell, Fiewell & Davy, 1983).

Rajesh was operated again and a shunting procedure was performed by a neurosurgeon to provide drainage to his blocked ventricles. He had several shunt revisions and orthopedic surgeries for his dislocated hips and clubfeet. He spent most of his pre-school years in the hospital.

Despite the fact that Education for All Handicapped Children Act, PL.94-142 (IDEA), was in place, Rajesh's family had to struggle to get him admitted in the regular school. Obtaining related services such as a wheelchair accessible van, and an aide to

help him with intermittent catheter was not an easy job for the family. School experiences were bittersweet for him. Many of his teachers neither understood his disability nor his cultural background. However, as Rajesh grew older, his struggles became less and less intense. He grew into a self-advocate.

Rajesh managed to stay in the inclusive classrooms despite the exclusionary efforts of some of his school teachers. He graduated from high school with an above average SAT score. He attended a fairly prestigious university and has now graduated with a Bachelor's degree. He has managed to obtain competitive employment although it is on a part time basis currently.

Rajesh's peers have often asked him as to what motives him? What gets him going? And, what keeps him going? His statements indicate that:

- Rajesh has an **internal locus of control**, a belief that one's behavior makes a difference. He maintains that to accomplish anything, one has to put forth effort. And, according to him, it is the difficulty level of the task that determines the amount of effort needed.
- Rajesh also appears to be **goal-oriented**. He is more achievement –motivated rather than affiliation-motivated. He **wants** and **expects** to succeed in life. He talks about his vision of his life. He states that whenever he fails in a required task, he persists longer and redoubles the effort until he succeeds. His parents always had **high expectations** from him. He strives to meet his parental expectations. It is a case of **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

- He also believes that there is a **positive relationship between success in school and life after school**. And, Maslow's deficiency needs (physiological, safety, love and esteem) can be better met with academic credentials.

Demographics of Asian Indian Families

A comprehensive review of demographic literature indicates that individuals of color constitute the majority in approximately 53 of the US cities. Of all the cultural groups, individuals with Asian background are growing at the fastest pace. According to census data, as of 1990, Asian Indian population in the US has increased by 111 percent. Asian Indian families tend to reside in and around major metropolitan areas. As shown in **Figure 1**, they are scattered in all regions of the country whereas majority, that is 35% of them live in the Northeast (Mogelonsky, 1995).

The Asian Indian families of the US are affluent. The median income for Asian-Indian households is $44,700 versus $31,200 for all US households. The first wave of Asian Indians who migrated to the US in 1960s constitutes mostly of doctors, engineers, academics and other professionals. The second wave of Asian Indian immigrants also represents highly educated professional males. Whereas, the more recent immigrant group is made up of relatives of earlier immigrants. They are often less educated than the members of first two segments. As shown in **Figure 2**, a vast majority of Asian Indian men have college education. However, many of them are willing to work in trade or service jobs . They view their low level jobs as a transitional period to acclimatize them to US and provide them with American currency that they need to get started (Mogelonsky, 1995). And, finally, as shown in **Figure 3**, majority of the Asian Indians, that is 75% of them, were born outside of the US.

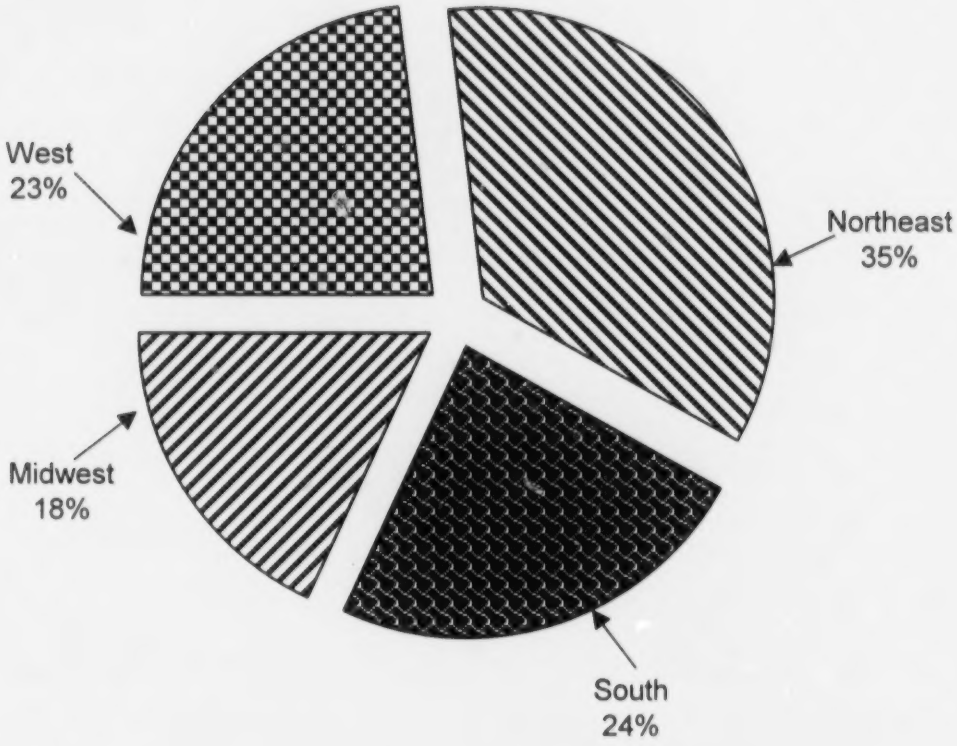

Figure 1. Residence Patterns of Asian Indians in the US

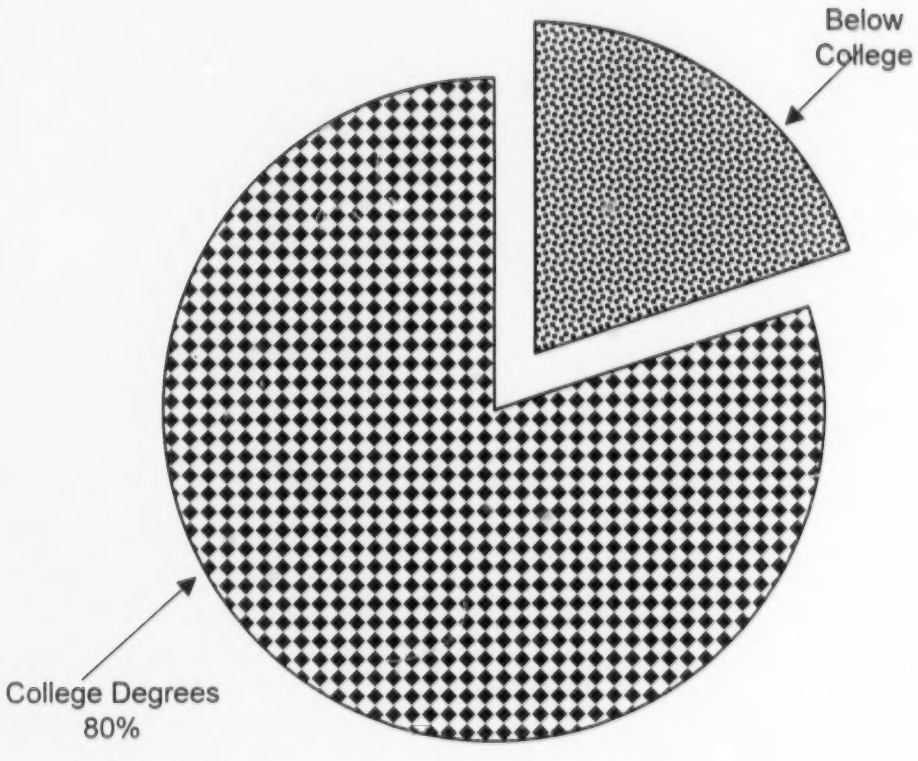

Figure 2. Educational Level of Asian Indian Men in the US

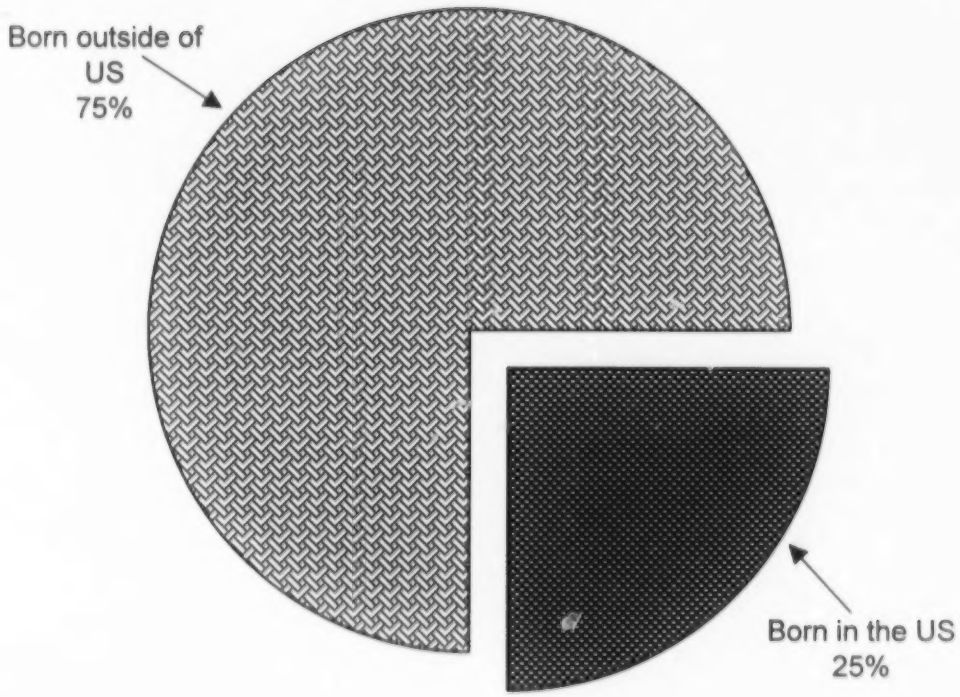

Figure 3. Place of Birth for Asian Indians

Family Structure

Amongst Asian Indian families, the traditional family system is that of joint family. In the recent years, however, among the middle class, there is a gradual move towards the nuclear family. Generally, in a typical joint family, three or more generations of family members live together. Elders carry authority and are respected. Family unit controls its members in all areas of their lives (Mulatti, 1995).

Family members are required to conform to family routines, rituals, traditions, and practices. They are conditioned to **collectivism** and **group orientation**. Interdependence of family members is valued and endeavors to formulate self-identity by any of the family members are prohibited (Sinha, 1984).

Family unit is believed to be self-sufficient. All familial, emotional, professional, financial and health related difficulties are handled within the family. Families tend to be strictly hierarchical, patriarchal, and patrilineal. Men act as heads of households, primary wage earners, decision makers, and disciplinarians. Families foster male supremacy, the husband maintains veto power. Females are raised to be subordinates (Dhurvajan, 1993).

Child Rearing Practices

As shown in Figure 4, majority, that is 55% of the Asian Indian women is homemakers. They take care of the household and are primary caregivers for their children. However, when the family unit is joint, grandparents, uncles and aunts, all get involved in the care of the children. Children get equally attached to their parents and grandparents.

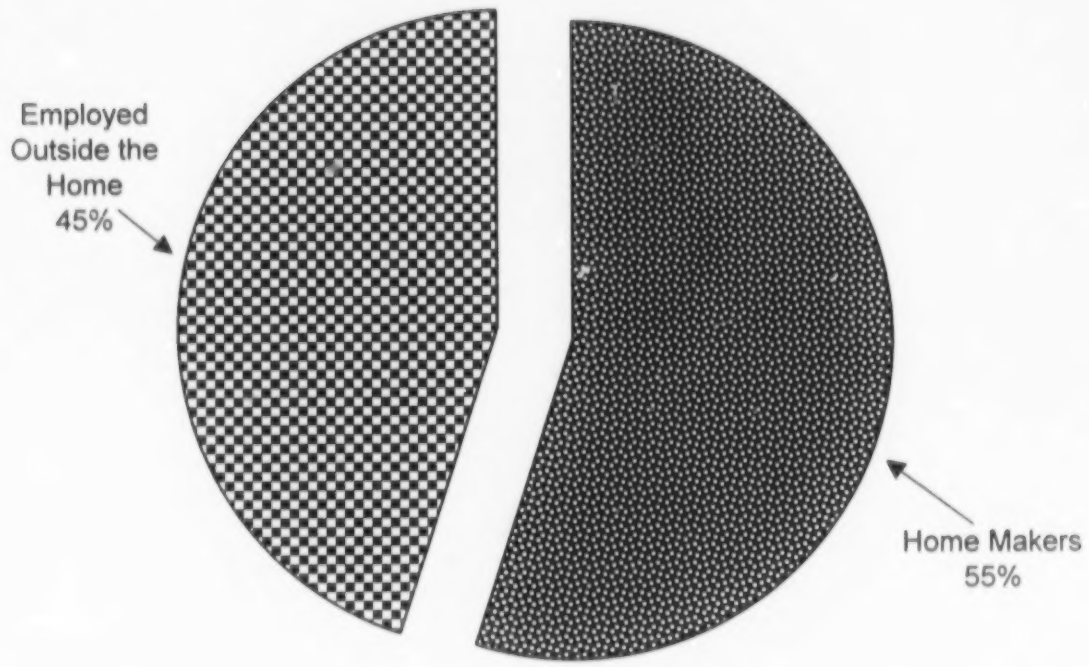

Figure 4. Employment of Asian Indian Women

In order to strengthen the family bond, children are encouraged to sleep with their parents from the time of birth to early childhood. Most of the families view the parenting job seriously, and attempt to internalize in their children the following:

- Value and importance of academic achievement.
- School failure is a lack of will and must be addressed by increased parental control.
- Spirituality and the need to be a noble human being.
- Respect for elders-grandparents, teachers, siblings, and family friends.
- Contrary to mainstream American culture that values Individualism and self-reliance, dependence on family, especially, for social and emotional needs throughout the parents' lives. **Conformity** and willingness to place family welfare over individual wishes. Need to prioritize "family" as Western cultures prioritize "individual".
- Ability to listen more than speak, and to speak softly.
- Modesty in dress and social behavior.
- Need to be goal-oriented and setting high educational expectations
- Eastern guidelines for living even though children are born and raised in Western milieu.

Asian Indian children like most second-generation Americans straddle two cultures. While they are as Americanized as their schoolmates, they are strongly influenced by their parents' traditions, religion and values (Mogelonsky, 1995).

Since in Asian Indian culture, teachers are given a much higher status than in the mainstream American culture, Asian Indian children thrive on teacher reinforcement. They work efficiently in a well structured, quiet environment (Baruth & Manning, 1992).

Value System of Asian Indian Families

Formal education is viewed as the most desirable asset among Asian Indian families. Asian Indian families consider educational credentials as infallible tool of upward mobility. They carefully monitor their children's academic activities. Parental expectations of outstanding academic achievement are communicated to the children as early as infancy. Anecdotal notes indicate that parents begin to tell their preschoolers that they have to become doctors, lawyers, engineers or some other professionals. The parental expectations are further confirmed when parents continually address their children as doctor, lawyer, and engineer until the children actually obtain those credentials.

Humility and a concern for others are the foundation of Asian Indian values. To make a living with honest means is considered highly honorable. "Seva", community service is an integral part of all Asian Indian religions. For example, at every "Gurdwara" (Sikh Church), "langar", free community kitchen is made available to people of all religions at least once a week if not everyday for twenty-four hours. It is a great expression of community service (Brar, 1998).

Asian Indian families emphasize **spirituality**. They pray and meditate. They engage in formal philosophical discussions focusing on the real meaning and goal of this life. They regularly discuss strategies for finding peace of mind and being one with God. A conscious effort is made by majority of the individuals to be noble human beings.

Belief System of Asian Indian Families

Religion plays an important role in Asian Indian homes. On daily basis, families sing bhajans/hymns and recite "slokas". In just about every home, either Bhagvad Gita or Guru Garanth Sahib (Holy Book) is read at least twice a day. A firm belief in Karma Theory guides the activities of daily living. Karma is a law of behavior and consequences. Actions of past lives affect the circumstances in which one is born and will live in this life. Social class, health, and intelligence are all determined by one's karma, or tally of good and bad deeds from previous life.

Further, the goal of life is freedom of "Atman" (soul) from endless reincarnation and suffering inherent in existence. One can work towards this goal by leading a pious life and by engaging in good karma.

Communication Style in Asian Indian Families

Compared to mainstream American culture, communication is more direct in Asian Indian homes. There are words designated to address the elders. Requests and commands are communicated in a declarative form as opposed to interrogative form. Non-verbal communication is relied upon. However, there are several subtle differences in the non-verbal communication of Asian Indian families and families of mainstream American culture. Gender differences in communication are not as vast as they are in mainstream American culture. And, lastly as Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) observed, communication is high context.

Summary/Conclusion

This paper reported the case of an Asian Indian youth who has spina bifida.

The motivational strategies that are employed by this highly motivated and academically successful young man are listed. Educationally pertinent data on demographics of Asian Indian families in the US is Included. Child rearing practices of Asian Indian families, the structure of their families, their belief system, their value system, and their communication style are discussed.

Given the increasing diversity of today's American society, it is imperative for all educators to acquire cross-cultural competence. Reliable alliances can only be established when cultural diversity is honored (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). And, as Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) ascertained, one way to acquire cross-cultural competence is to follow the posture of cultural reciprocity. This approach involves sharing perspectives between families and educators in an effort to "get on each other's wave length."

References

Banks, J. A. (1989). Multicultural education: Characteristics and goals. In J.A. Banks & C.A.M. Banks (Eds.), Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Baruth, L. G. & Manning, M. L. (1992). Multicultural education of children and adolescents. Needam Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Brar, S. S. (1998). Sikh Religious Philosophy. Available: http://www.sikhs.org/philos.htm

Dhuvarajan, V. (1993). Ethnic cultural retention and transmission among first generation Hindu Asian Indians in a Canadian prairie city. Journal of Comparative Studies, 24 (1), 63-79.

Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (1999). Culture in special education. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Mitchell, D. C., Fiewell, E. & Davy, P. (1983). Spina Bifida. In J. Umbreit (Ed.), Physical disabilities and health impairments: An introduction. Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill.

Mogelonsky, M. (1995). Asian American Indians. Available: http://www.demographics.cm/Publications/AD/95_ad/9508_ad/ad781.htm

Mulatti, L. (1995). Families in India: Beliefs and realities. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 26 (1), 11-26.

Seligman, M. (1991). The family with a handicapped child (2nd ed.). Needam Heights, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Sinha, D. (1984). Some recent changes in the Indian family and their implications for socialization. The Indian Journal of Social Work, 65, 271-286.

Turnbull, A. & Turnbull, R. (2001). Families, professionals, and exceptionality: collaborating for empowerment (4th ed.). Columbus, OH: Prentice-Hall.

Ysseldyke, J. E. & Algozzine, B (1995). Special education: A practical approach for teachers (3rd ed.) Boston: Hoghton Mifflin.